

## Sermon Notes from the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany or World Mission – Year B

**RCL Readings** – Isaiah 40:21-31; Psalm 147:1-11, 20c; I Corinthians 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-39

**ACNA Readings** – Genesis 12:1-3; Psalm 86:8-13; Revelation 7:9-17; Matthew 28:16-20

**Seasonal Introduction.** Epiphany of the Lord is celebrated on the 6th of January in the Western Christian calendar and the season continues until Ash Wednesday and Lent. Epiphany is a Greek word meaning 'showing forth, appearance, or manifestation'. During this season, the church celebrates the manifestation of the Messiah on earth between the time of His birth and preparation for His death and ascension. The Baptism of Jesus, His presentation at the Temple, and His transfiguration—all events with deep connections to Jewish life and history.

**Common Theme.** The Scriptures, both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, lay solid foundations for the servant mentality that is an inherent part of following the Lord Jesus. Servanthood does not come with glamour and prestige; in fact, it's the opposite. This can result in the desire to serve not being common in our community, even within Christian circles. Too often we get ourselves into positions of power so that we don't have to serve others but instead are served ourselves. Or, more simply, we have a limited view of Jesus—about how He serves us, how He cares for us, how He has mercy on us (all this is true)—and forget the responsibility and obligations that we have towards Him and others (which is also true). The theme that permeates our readings this week is the calling to serve the Lord, our communities, and the world.

**Hebraic Context.** The word servant in Hebrew is 'eved' עֶבֶד. The word shares the same root for the words slave, work and, interestingly, also worship.<sup>1</sup> Slavery is considered an evil (particularly in modernity but also by many throughout history) so it can strike people as strange that the New Testament describes one aspect of our relationship to the Lord as 'Slaves for Christ'. The Hebrew Scriptures do not formally or explicitly condemn slavery. This has caused all kinds of theological conundrums for students of the Bible and has been used to justify slavery (or used to accuse the Bible of poor morality).

However, Biblical slavery does not carry the same form of servitude enforced on captives in other traditions. In the Hebrew Bible, slavery more often than not takes the form of indentured service. There are no prisons or jails in the Torah. Punishment was enacted immediately after sentencing. Should your punishment be financial and you are unable to make the appropriate monetary restitution, then you would be forced by the court into indentured service. You would become a slave or a servant and work to pay off your debt.

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 3:12, for instance, is properly translated as both "serve" in some translations and "worship" in others. In Hebrew, either can be conveyed in the same word and, if written, spoken, or acted on in relation to a god, surely the one would automatically be associated with the other.

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However, the Torah makes provision for the release of servants after seven years.<sup>2</sup> And if, at any time, you physically harmed a servant they were to be set free.<sup>3</sup> Thus, while the Scriptures do not explicitly condemn slavery, they understand it was not the intended style of human relationships. The relationship between a master and servant was not to be harsh or painful and it was understood that special bonds of love could result over time between a master and servant. In this context, there was a provision included in the Torah in which a slave or indentured servant could continue to remain in the employment of his master (Exodus 21:5).<sup>4</sup> Slavery was a fact of life in the Greco-Roman world of the New Testament. However our relationship to Jesus as servants and slaves is based in the Hebraic context of love and the desire to remain in that relationship.

**Isaiah 40:21-31.** Isaiah begins this passage amazed that anyone could doubt the awesome power of God when they look at Creation. Paul reflects on this same idea in Romans 1:20 in which he says, “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.” Secular culture may attempt to suppress the existence of God through arguments of ‘science’. Yet there are always scientists of all streams that are believing Christians and followers of Jesus, who would argue through science very much the opposite; that science and observable nature imply a grand designer.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The doctrine that we can only have one master goes back to Israel in Egypt. God brought Israel out of Egypt not just so Israel wouldn’t be the slaves of Egypt, but in order that they become the slaves of God (Leviticus 25:42, 55). Therefore, if a debt had to be paid or an Israelite was so poor they had to sell themselves as a slave, they were to be treated as if they were a hired servant (Leviticus 25:39-43). Generally, this shouldn’t even become an issue as the law of hospitality was to be enacted for any who were poor and food should be sold to them at cost (Leviticus 25:35-37). But, if a debt had to be paid or a Hebrew was a slave to another Israelite, they were to be released after seven years or in the year of Jubilee (Exodus 21:1; Leviticus 25:40).

The Bible harshly accuses both those who take advantage and those who forsake the poor and needy. Nehemiah hears out a court case of Jewish slaves against their brothers (Nehemiah 5:1-13). Nehemiah rules in favour of the slaves whereby all of their belongings, the means by which they could provide for themselves, was returned to them.

<sup>3</sup> The Bible does make a distinction between Israelite slaves and foreign slaves. However, Exodus 21:26-27 makes it clear that slaves could not be harmed by the will of the owner (or through an accident) without the full release of the slave—whether Hebrew or foreigner.

<sup>4</sup> Conversely, if the relationship between a master and slave was so bad that the slave ran away from the oversight and provision a master should provide those in need, Moses states that the slave was to be allowed to live in the town of his choice. They were not to be persecuted for having been a runaway slave nor should they be returned to their master (Deuteronomy 23:15-16).

<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that Christians are neither infallible (though we all have the Holy Spirit) nor ignorant. Throughout history, Christians have, at times, been in the forefront of scientific knowledge and research (as have, among others, Persians, Chinese, Greeks, Indians, Muslims, and Atheists). Isaiah 40:22 (along with Job 26:7-10) is noted, by many Christians, to speak of the world as a sphere and thus

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The prophet compares the majesty of God against the insignificance of those who dwell on earth, they are like insects to the Lord. At the conclusion of the passage, having described the greatness of God, Isaiah demonstrates how the Lord loves and serves His creation. Even though the Lord is so powerful and almighty, He gives strength to the weary and power to the weak. God doesn’t have to do this; He does so out of love. *‘Those that wait on the Lord will renew their strength’*. The verb ‘wait’ וַיִּקַּח *kava* in the final verse does not refer to the passive ‘sitting and waiting for something to happen’ which is נָחַח *chaka* in Hebrew. Instead, Isaiah suggests a waiting of expectation involving an enduring activity such as looking.<sup>6</sup> Those who trust in the Lord endure—patiently looking and seeking God’s hand at work in the world and for His strength and guidance. God provides strength and power for use in His service. The Lord serves us so that we can serve alongside Him.

**Psalm 147:1-11, 20c.**<sup>7</sup> The psalmist opens with “Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting.” and then presents some of the

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scientifically accurate from an early date. This may be true, certainly I would argue that Isaiah 40:22 is exceedingly true—God is greater than the earth, He made it and we are as nothing (and yet, God still gives strength to us).

However, a close examination of the word *gōn* and its use at the time of writing indicates that our translation of “sphere” is anachronistic. Whether in Job 22:14, Isaiah 40:22 and 44:13, Proverbs 8:27 or Ecclesiasticus 43:12 it is hard to argue that sphere should be the proper translation. The Septuagint also doesn’t translate *gōn* as *sphaera* or *globus* (despite the fact that many in the Greek world, when the Septuagint was written, would have argued that the world was a sphere) but rather as *gyros*—as in, “Popilius did a thing which was looked upon as exceedingly overbearing and insolent. Happening to have a vine stick in his hand, he drew a circle round Antiochus with it, and ordered him to give his answer to the letter before he stepped out of that circumference.” (Polybius, Histories, 29.27)

Isaiah 40:22 has become a popular tool used by Christian apologists to prove the Bible as supernaturally ahead of its time. Unfortunately, it can become a strawman for non-believers to poke holes in as, while it is not untrue, it is easy to show that it does not mean what many apologists today claim it to mean simply because they have not examined it in context.

Sometimes, it is best to try to see the universe through the eyes of the prophet and poet—even those inspired by the Holy Spirit who knows all things. To read the Bible with our own ideas forefront, even if to prove the Bible true, can actually limit the message to our own current culture and time if we don’t also see it in the context it was written in.

<sup>6</sup> In Job 6:19, for instance, “to wait” is poetically linked with “to look” while in Psalm 27:14, waiting is linked with the command to be strong and take courage.

<sup>7</sup> The word ‘*Hallelujah*’ הַלְלִיָּהּ is an imperative to ‘Praise the Lord’ and the word stands at the beginning of eleven psalms: 106, 111-113, 117, 135, 146-150. *Hallelujah* is also the final word of twelve psalms: 104-106, 113, 115-116, 135, 146-150. These have come to be known as the Hallel psalms.

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reasons for that worship.<sup>8</sup> The psalm highlights some of the ways in which God serves His own creation and how He defends and blesses his people. Of particular note is the Lord's care for Jerusalem and the exiles. He brings back the captives and heals the brokenhearted. His love goes beyond the scope of humanity and includes care for Creation itself. The psalmist notes how He pays attention to each and every star in heaven.<sup>9</sup> When the Lord casts His eyes towards mankind it is the humble of heart that take His attention. The wicked, those with pride instead of humility, are driven into the ground.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> We recognize that the majority of the Psalms are prayers and were often sung, but they were also an excellent way to impart theological truths to those praying, singing, or hearing the musicians praise God.

<sup>9</sup> Psalm 147:4, 8-9 is one more reminder that Humans, while made in the image of God and beloved by God, are not the sole focus of God. Life isn't just about me—See footnote 10 and C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity*.

<sup>10</sup> Pride and humility become intertwined in Scripture. God is gracious to the humble but judges the proud. "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom" (Prov. 11:2). "The LORD detests all the proud of heart" (Prov. 16:5). "The reward for humility and fear of the LORD is riches and honor and life" (Prov. 22:4). In prayers, such as Hannah or Mary's, they recognize that God lifts up the humble. "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant... He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty."

James will write the same, "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you." While Paul provides an example to follow, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:35). Or, as one version put it: "Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus."

As another example, humility was a chief characteristic of Moses (Numbers 12:3). According to Jewish exegesis this quality was one that allowed Moses and God to communicate face to face. No other person in the Bible has that distinction. Those who want to talk to God need to put aside pride and become humble like Moses.

C.S. Lewis spoke quite strongly about humility and pride, "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less." "... The essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride... Pride leads to every other vice. It is the complete anti-God state of mind." "Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man." "In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that—and, therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison—you do not know God at all." (*Mere Christianity*)

Tertullian disparaged pride, putting it into a category known as the "seven deadly sins", thought to lead the soul to hell. It is often deemed to be one of Satan's essential features.

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**I Corinthians 9:16-23.** The apostle Paul describes his ministry as one in which he has no choice. Paul says he is, “compelled to preach”, which he clarifies later by saying he does so willingly and freely. The context of his free and willing service is set in the Jewish tradition of receiving payment for being a preacher.<sup>11</sup> Paul states boldly that since his encounter with the risen Lord on the road to Damascus he has become a “servant to all”, working and preaching the truth amongst both Jews and Gentiles.

I Corinthians 9:19-23 can be quite confusing. After all, Paul states that “to the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews.” Paul was already not only Jewish (specifically from the tribe of Benjamin) but was incredibly learned in the Bible and Judaism of his day. Paul was not only knowledgeable about the Bible, he was also Torah observant—he took Timothy to be circumcised, he went to Jerusalem for the festivals, he brought sacrifices to the temple (all after he encountered Jesus). There are those, even among orthodox Christian scholars, who argue that Paul was hypocritical, inconsistent, or even in sin. As an Israelite under an eternal covenant with God, of course Paul would remain faithful to the commands regarding that covenant. But what of the argument that Paul was hypocritical or inconsistent?

Paul stated in Romans 1:1 that he [is] a servant to the Messiah. But he was also called to minister to both Jew and Greek, slave and free, rich and poor. Just as Paul doesn't tell the Jews to become Greek or the Greeks to become Jews, Paul doesn't command the rich to become poor (nor does he command the poor to become rich). Paul cannot simply cease to be a Jewish man. However, perhaps, here in Corinthians, Paul is referring to the way and manner he speaks and the terms he uses in relation to whom he is addressing.

Paul was very familiar with the oral Torah, using known examples (that would later become parts of the Mishnah, Gemara, Talmud etc) to teach other Jewish men and women who were also

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<sup>11</sup> The Torah speaks about paying the worker (even if that worker is an ox) their proper wage in a timely manner (Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 24:15, 25:4). This command from God was also understood to include teachers (I Timothy 5:17-18). One example we read about is when Jesus sends out the 70 disciples (Matthew 10:10; Luke 10:7).

There is a Talmudic phrase that says, *Ain kemach ain Torah, ain Torah ain kemach* which translates as: without flour (food) there is no Torah, without Torah there is no flour (food). Which means, if you cannot sustain yourself physically with a living salary then you cannot truly sustain yourself spiritually with the Word of God, and if you have no spiritual input in your life then you are truly missing the essential nutrition of the soul. “Man does not live on bread alone!” This is true. What is also true is that when you are starving you rarely think about attending a Bible study.

The Didache, in chapter 13, states that “a true teacher is himself worthy, like the workman, of his food.” The fact that Paul did not take payment from the Corinthians did not excuse them from giving, however, as it continues, “if you have not a prophet, give to the poor.”

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familiar with these teachings and doctrines. Teaching a gentile who had hardly even heard of a God of Israel through those same arguments would hardly be of service to them without proper context.<sup>12</sup> So Paul taught, challenged, and lived as a servant and minister to all he met—even giving up things that were due him, like payment—for his desire was to win people into the kingdom of heaven.

**Mark 1:29-39.** Simon Peter, according to John 1:42, was also known as Cephas and was originally from the fishing village of Bethsaida. Mark 1:29 has him living with his brother, Andrew, in Capernaum along with his mother in law. Following Jesus' healing of a man with an impure spirit on the Sabbath, He leaves the synagogue in Capernaum, with James and John, and enters the house of Simon and Andrew. Peter's mother-in-law also resides with them and we are told she is unwell in bed with a fever. Jesus first serves her (she remains unnamed) and heals her of the fever. Immediately, the mother in law begins to serve them.<sup>13</sup>

Mark then describes the residents of Capernaum bringing all the sick and demon-possessed to the Lord for healing. Not rejecting a single person, Jesus serves each and every one and heals them all. Mark notes that the sun had set and that it was now evening. This would indicate that the Sabbath had ended and people were free to move around and conduct business again. Capernaum was a devout village,<sup>14</sup> so as soon as the Sabbath restrictions were over the Jewish residents were quick to seek out Jesus.

Several times in the gospels we read of Jesus rising early, often while it was still dark, and sought a quiet place for contemplation and prayer. Jesus was not against public or group prayer, however He does demonstrate to us a need to also engage in private, personal prayer. For emphasis in Matthew 6:6 Jesus teaches us that, "when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in

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<sup>12</sup> Today, if you went to a Muslim country, you would not become a Muslim to reach the Muslims. What you might do is learn what the Qur'an says about God, the prophets and the Bible. You would learn how to teach the Gospel in a way that was culturally relevant, sometimes acknowledging sensitivities and, perhaps, sometimes challenging your neighbours in those places that the Scriptures would challenge them.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 8:14 has a slight textual change in which the mother in law serves 'him' while the parallel passages in Mark and Luke say 'them'.

<sup>14</sup> Peter describes himself as never having eaten anything non-kosher which would indicate a pious Jewish lifestyle. Capernaum also had one of the earliest Synagogues, as mentioned in Luke 7. And, while there was a Roman presence, even the centurion was a God-fearer.

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secret, will reward you.”<sup>15</sup> Jesus shows us that there is an importance to solitary time with the Lord.

Later, His disciples locate Him and inform Jesus that many people are looking for Him. Jesus' response is to move on and preach in other towns and villages. In Luke's parallel record (Luke 4:42-44), Jesus emphatically states that, “I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.” Jesus neither made His piety an object of praise nor did He remain in one place to bask in popularity. Rather, He resumed an itinerant lifestyle of service to the lost sheep of the House of Israel and demonstrated to us the role of the servant king.

**Hebraic Perspective.** In antiquity, there was a strong view that certain diseases and sickness were associated with spirits or demonic activity. In some cases, tragic events, such as the collapse of buildings or catastrophic natural disasters like earthquakes were thought to be caused by the wrath of the gods.<sup>16</sup> Jewish tradition in the ancient world also associated tragedy and sickness to sinful behaviour. In Luke 13:4, Jesus asks rhetorically, “those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?” The gospels relate many stories of Jesus healing a multitude of people in His home region of the Galilee. In those narratives, many different types of diseases and sicknesses are mentioned. Then we are told that some people actually suffer due to demoniacs or demons. That is, some illnesses are the result of either demon possession or demonic oppression—but not the majority. The exact relationship of modern day illness and disease to evil spirits is unclear. What is certain in both Jewish and Christian tradition is that sickness, diseases and everything associated with death was not a part of the original creation, it has been added into the world through the Fall. And we all long for it to be removed when “death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire” Revelation 20:14

### ACNA Addendum

**Introduction.** The history of World Mission Sunday began in 1926 when Pope Pius XI added it to the calendar of the Catholic Church. Pope Pius XI had also added Christ the King Sunday to the calendar a year prior in 1925. This was in reaction to the rise of nationalism and the decline

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<sup>15</sup> In the 1st Century the Scriptures were read in public, as the Bible was a community document and not personal property. The prayers and hymns of the Psalms were, in particular, a part of the communal life as they would be sung in public. However, communal prayers were to be just that, for the benefit of the community and in worship of God. Here, Jesus lives out the example He would later teach in Matthew 6:5-13.

<sup>16</sup> Even today, there is the understanding that some things are outside of our power and control. In the modern world the phrase ‘Act of God’ is an insurance term that describes a natural event or disaster where there is little the homeowner could have done to prevent the damage. Unfortunately, some Christians are quick to point out that, when something bad happens, God is surely judging that country, city, or person—even when they do not know the truth of the matter.

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in church attendance following the devastation of World War One. Pius sought to return Christ as the focus of redemption in contrast to the false leadership of human dictators. He also sought to reinvigorate missionary activity and return the gospel to the world. This Sunday is a day of prayer for missions and a call for increased support of all missionaries.

**Genesis 12:1-3.** Abram enters the Scriptures without any background or historical narrative. He is called by the Lord to leave his identity behind him, to leave his country of origin, his cultural people group and his extended family, all of which contribute to his identity. His mission is one that will affect not only his own immediate family, but the whole world. Abram, later Abraham, will become a blessing to all the peoples of the earth. He is told to לך לך *lech lecha*, which is often rendered as 'go from', however, literally it means 'go to yourself'.<sup>17</sup> This begs the question: where exactly is Abram stepping out to and what type of journey is he really on? Abram leaves the past behind and the identity which is associated with that past. He moves forward toward a (largely unknown) future where he will discover a new and perhaps even more real identity within himself. One aspect of our calling in mission is a discovery of who we really are in ourselves and how we view the world and its inhabitants.<sup>18</sup>

**Psalm 86:8-13.** Historically there has never been a culture that has not practiced some form of religion. Every nation in antiquity has had a respect for the sacred and a system of beliefs and practices revolving around various deities. In this psalm, David does not offer an apologetic as to their validity or existence, he simply proclaims that there is no God like the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob..

In the world of late antiquity, gods were often viewed as territorial and regional. David recognized God as the creator of all peoples and nations. Despite the other nations having their own particular beliefs concerning their origins and which deity to give homage, David states prophetically that all nations *whom You have made* will come and worship the Lord. He established the boundaries and lands of each people, not just the people of Israel. Verse 10 states the truth emphatically; *You alone are God*. There are no other gods! This belief that there is only one God and only one truth should encourage us to world mission. David has

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<sup>17</sup> Rashi notes that לך לך (*lech lecha*) can also mean "go for yourself" (prepositions in Hebrew have a variety of meanings). Abraham in leaving the country of his ancestors and in obedience to God would do so for his own benefit and good. A common Jewish rendering of this concept is to state that only in following God can we truly be who God wants us to be.

<sup>18</sup> This can be very practical and not just a nebulous "discovery of oneself". We are constantly lying to ourselves about who we are—proud as we are and lacking in humility; overemphasizing (or underestimating) our importance; and we find many false gods to worship that continue to lead us astray. Abram, in following the command of God, learned amazing and wonderful things throughout his journey that were truly beneficial as he became more and more faithful as he saw the faithfulness of God.



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established that there is only one Lord and thus desires to know Him, His ways, His heart and plan for the world.

So David entreats the Lord to teach him how he should walk in the truth. The truth needs to be taught, it will not come to us via osmosis. And having been taught, we must walk in that truth.<sup>19</sup>

**Revelation 7:9-17.** In the revelation of Jesus to John, the apostle was shown the result of world mission. Before the throne of God there are a plethora of nations and peoples.<sup>20</sup> Every nation is said to be represented before the Lord.<sup>21</sup> In response to the worship of God by humanity in the future, the angelic company of heaven joins in with praise and adoration of God. John then informs us that the people that he sees now before the throne are from a special event in future history, the Great Tribulation. They had experienced a time of trouble and persecution on earth. We have not been promised an easy life and there is definite opposition to the Good News but this did not cause the gospel to fail! Those that went through persecution did not fail in their conviction, and in their endurance they received a reward so fantastic as to stand and worship before the Lord Himself. Missionaries all over the world face danger and death. Our encouragement to continue to support them and engage further is that there is the prophetic hope and, indeed, truth of victory.

**Matthew 28:16-20.** The final instructions of Jesus, according to Matthew, are quite simple and straightforward. Unlike John's gospel, which has Jesus appear and fellowship with His disciples in Jerusalem, Matthew places us immediately in the Galilee in which Jesus sends the disciples out into the world with the truth of the gospel. The Lord has left us with the task of making disciples.

There is a path and an order to the Great Commission. Firstly, Jesus has the authority to send us—He is the master and we are the servants. The resurrection has confirmed who He is and the authority that He wields.<sup>22</sup> We are instructed to baptize and to teach people to obey the

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<sup>19</sup> If we hear the truth but do not walk in obedience, we do not fear God—we do not glorify God. And if we believe that we possess the truth and we choose to withhold the truth from others, then are insolent men, a band of ruthless men—for we have not set God before us.

<sup>20</sup> This vision scene should instill in us a great sense of hope. This provides evidence that the message of Jesus as the Messiah succeeds in reaching people around the world. Satan has been unsuccessful in stopping the spread of the gospel. With this foreknowledge we can enter World Mission Sunday with confidence and hope.

<sup>21</sup> It appears, on a literal reading, that people will continue to have individual characteristics in the world to come. Of note here is that the resurrected bodies of the believers as seen by John in heaven still retain their national identities. Original languages are also retained as John notes that every tongue is represented in heaven. God delights in diversity and the world to come is as diverse as the current one.

<sup>22</sup> Ephesians 2 speaks richly of how we who were dead in trespasses and sins are made alive by the grace of God. But it is prefaced by Paul stating why we can trust his message—namely, that Jesus was

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commandments of the Lord. The word 'disciple' in Hebrew means 'student'. We are not instructed to 'go get them saved', although salvation is indeed part of the process it is not in and of itself the end goal. The task is to make disciples and teach obedience.

Discipleship is a lifelong endeavour; we continue to learn more about the Lord every day. Rabbi Akiva (a rabbi from the early 2nd Century), when about to be led away for execution at the hands of the Romans, was accompanied by his disciples who noted that Akiva was crying. They asked, "Why do cry? Is it because the Romans will soon execute you?" His reply was, "No. I cry because I no longer have any more time to study the Scriptures." One of the tasks of the Great Commission is to make people passionate about studying God's word and putting it into practice.

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raised from the dead, is seated at God's right hand, and had all rule, authority, power, and dominion given to Him. If Jesus were not literally raised from the dead, the authority given to Him—and from Him to us—would be as meaningless as the life we would be living.

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